



**MURDOCH RESEARCH REPOSITORY**

<http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au>

*This is the author's final version of the work, as accepted for publication following peer review but without the publisher's layout or pagination.*

**Wright, P. (2011) Big hART's GOLD project: Bringing communities into existence. Murdoch University. Big hART, Western Australia.**

<http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/6176>

Copyright © Murdoch University. Big hART  
It is posted here for your personal use. No further distribution is permitted.

# Big *h*ART's GOLD Project: Bringing Communities into Existence



Dr Peter Wright  
Murdoch University



**Big *h*ART's GOLD Project: Bringing  
Communities into Existence**

**Peter Wright**

**Murdoch University**

**2011**

“Culture is a matrix of infinite possibilities and choices. From within the same culture matrix we can extract arguments and strategies for the degradation or ennoblement of our species, for its enslavement or liberation, for the suppression of its productive potential or its enhancement.”

Wole Soyinka, Nigerian Nobel Laureate

## **Big *h*ART's GOLD Project: Bringing Communities into Existence**

### **Introduction.**

This report provides an analysis of Big *h*ART's GOLD Project. It documents and evaluates successes and challenges faced through this project. First, the evaluation methodology employed is described, then the project itself in brief is introduced with its aspirations and methodologies. Second, the project is situated in a broader context locating it within an interconnected web of pressing social issues, climate change, and participatory arts practices; it is the correlations between these issues and Big *h*ART's practices that make the global local, and the local global providing better tools for understanding the impact of the GOLD project. A broad *overview* of the project's intents is presented showing in brief what was and was not achieved. Third, the three key project objectives are considered and evidence—the *Results Chart*—in relation to those objectives is presented in order to better understand the project, its outcomes, and challenges. Fourth, a summary is provided of the strengths of the project, its achievements, and the lessons learnt.

### **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

#### **The Project**

GOLD was a multi-layered intergenerational crime prevention project that sought to explore the association between financial and emotional pressures on rural families and crimes such as family violence, alcohol and substance abuse and crimes amongst younger members of rural communities. The project particularly examined the pressures on rural families caused by drought, water restrictions, and

crop failure in the long-term context of climate change, the challenge being that pressures are manifest in a variety of forms.

Through GOLD Big *h*ART worked across rural properties including Rand, Boree Creek, the Hume Weir, Condobolin, Mildura, Stanthorpe and Goondiwindi and Griffith. These properties are located on or near the state boundaries of South Western Queensland, Western NSW, and the NSW Victoria border. These properties cover much of the Murray Darling Basin. Funding for this project came substantially from the Attorney General's National Crime Prevention Programme with six other sources providing funding for different project emphases.

### **The context**

Consistent with Big *h*ART's practices, creative solutions to seemingly intractable issues were developed with the communities where the project was located; in this case extending out from Griffith in South-Western NSW along the Murray Darling Basin (MDB) into Southern Queensland, through to the South Australian border, and following a major component of the MDB, along the NSW Victoria border to the Hume Weir. In terms of challenges faced by the project, this area comprises three of Australia's longest rivers—the Darling, Murray, and Murrumbidgee—14% of the nation's landmass, and approximately 10% of the Australian population. In terms of importance to the Australian economy approximately 70% of all water used by irrigation for agriculture is located within the MDB making it Australia's most important agricultural region (Murray Darling Basin Commission).

"The Big Dry" or "Millennium Drought" has been Australia's worst drought in recorded history. It has impacted on the environment, the economy, and the people who both depend on the interaction between these and who contribute to it.

Despite recent floods in a number of areas in Australia, the southern parts of the MDB are still in drought (Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts), and the culminative human impact of 10 years of significant stressors is substantial and ongoing.

The human dimensions of this extreme weather event are significant; the impact being both inter- and intra-generational. For example, as water diminishes crops fail or cannot be planted; as one exemplar, the rice industry has been perceived to be 'failing' with a record 1.6 million tonne crop in 2000/2001 to Australia's smallest in 2007/2008 of 18,000 tonnes (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics). Consistent with the links between rural communities and the ecosystem on which they depend there is a commensurate reduction in income and economic security, gaps in services widen, employment opportunities contract, access to and experiences of education diminish, physical and mental health deteriorates, stress increases, social cohesion weakens, and hope fails. In the words of one young person "I can't really remember what a good season is, I'm too young – it has been drought for so long" (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2008). One farmer also recounted a sentiment expressed consistently across the farmers interviewed: "I have three or four friends who I really worry about". In short, drought diminishes capacity and the human ability to thrive. It is this context that social interaction becomes more easily brutalised and relationships brittle and fragmented.

That people's behaviour is influenced by the weather is well understood. Extreme weather events also produce extreme behaviours. For example, looting is regularly reported after cyclonic events, flooding or fires, both in Australia and overseas. Data reported in the wake of Cyclone Katrina indicated significant subsequent rises in

homicides, rapes, thefts, car-jackings and a break down of civil society (Bass 2008). There are also a number of studies showing that high temperatures and associated weather parameters influence various forms of violence, including assaults and self harm. When extreme weather events are amplified over prolonged periods of time—the Big Dry comprised 10 years of drought for example—the impacts on individuals and communities affected are insidious and exacerbated; leisure, for example, and other **re-creative** activities are the first things to go. This impact is made more poignant in rural communities by way of contrast to urban populations by both inequality and inequity in terms of access to resources, geographic isolation, visibility, and lower health status; a consequence being that anti-social and self-harming behaviours are further magnified. What seems consistent across many project participants were feelings of being ‘abandoned’.

In addition, The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) [MEA] compiled by over 2000 international authors and reviewers foregrounded the multiple constituent elements needed for human wellbeing. This report helps better understand the significance of the challenges faced by GOLD through highlighting five key areas including *security, basic material for a good life, health, good social relations, and freedom of choice and action*, each of which depend either directly or indirectly on ecosystems, the services they provide, and interconnections between them. GOLD addressed these areas in both micro and macro ways contributing purposefully to four of these five nominated areas.

It is also important to understand that each of these five areas is in a complex inter-relationship with the others, and causal inferences are mediated by differences in support, provision, regulation, space, time, and a range of modifying forces. For



example, cultural services may be less tangible than material services, nonetheless they are highly valued by members of society and play a critical role in enhancing social capital and wellbeing. Consequently they have a key role to play in 'partnership approaches to crime reduction' and the maintenance of a civil society (Ekblom & Wyvekens, 2004).

Significantly, **un-civil** behaviours are manifestations of 'dis-ease' or lack of ease that is felt or experienced in the body. This means that crime prevention is inextricably linked to individual's and his or her sense of self and wellbeing, and the interconnected web—an **ecology**—of physical, social, geographic and cultural factors. Consequently, strengthening individuals and the communities they connect with reduces social anxiety and enhances feelings of community safety and wellbeing building social cohesion and commensurate levels of trust; these being powerful ways of preventing crime, fear of crime, and violence against self, family, and others (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Drought and water scarcity or redistribution manifests itself initially in degradation of ecosystems—Griffith itself, in the words one Council member, “doesn’t survive without water”. This degradation impacts broadly on food, fibre, fuel, genetic resources, bio-chemicals, natural medicines, and pharmaceuticals, ornamental resources, and fresh water. However, beyond material benefits the MEA also identified multi-faceted interconnections between *cultural diversity, spiritual and religious values, traditional and formal knowledge systems, educational values, inspiration, sense of place, aesthetic values, social relations, cultural heritage values, and recreation and ecotourism*. What this highlights is a complex milieu in which Big hART works and why causality is difficult to determine.

## **EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

This evaluation was built on multiple lines of evidence and analyses including reviewing all available documentation; application's, progress reports and the like, media reports, material available from the purpose built digital platform, including blogs, tweets, images and movies, media reports, and two field trips including one to Griffith where a public exhibition of digital images was observed, young people and their families were interviewed, as well as arts workers, rural farming families, the creative producer, members of the reference group and council representatives. In addition, the second field trip included observations, analyses and reflections on the GOLDCROP event held at CarriageWorks in Redfern Sydney. This event enabled judgments to be made about the quality of work produced, the engagement and commitment of the farmers, their families, and the young people involved, and the impact the project had on their lives. This event and follow-up interviews provided further evidence of the vitality that the project engendered.

## **PROCESS EVALUATION**

### **Overview of Project Aims: Intent and Achievements**

Drawing from the application submitted to the National Community Crime Prevention Programme the following summary reveals in brief the project aims and achievements (Table 1). However, it is important to contextualise this *overview* table in terms of differentiating between aims and objectives where aims are broad aspirations, or notions of intent established early, and objectives are specific and measurable and indicate both process and product. Specific project objectives are considered in a following section and synthesised in the *Results Chart* (Table 2).

<b>Aim</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Not-Achieved</b>
Look at pressures on families resulting from climate change	√	
Build relationships with multiple generations across Murray Darling River Basin	√	
Inquire into the correlation between financial emotional pressures and family violence, substance abuse, crimes amongst young people	√	
Skill young people in digital skills, pro-social skills and social participation	√	
Mentor young people, record and archive rural families stories	√	
Exploration of intergenerational stories	√	
Draw people together	√	
Increase communication between 'targeted' groups	√	
Prevention of crime	√	
Develop confidence and literacy skills of young people	√	
Presentation of performances back to families and communities		√ <sup>a</sup>
Increase help-seeking behaviour	√	
Workshops producing short 'media' pieces based on material gathered with rural families	√	
A performance piece written by Scott Rankin will assist in understanding pressure on rural families as a consequence of drought and climate change		√ <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> While live performances were not delivered back to families and communities, films 'intimate screenings', images and text were.

<sup>b</sup> The performance and documentary were subject to supplementary funding applications to the Major Festivals Initiative (unsuccessful) and a separate funding application respectively.

Significantly, what the evaluation revealed was an interconnectedness between crime prevention, people experiencing marginalisation, social exclusion, and health and wellbeing. In the words of one young person, "I was so angry. I wanted to kill people. It's lucky that the gun laws exist in Australia because, seriously, I would

have got a gun and shot people.” And another “I am now a lot less agro – a more relaxed person”. One mother of a young functionally illiterate person in Griffith shared how, prior to him becoming involved in GOLD, she worried about “this son [with Asperger’s Syndrome] the most. There was deep sadness within him, he just wouldn’t communicate. Now he’s happy for the first time in his life...” hence now, out of all her children, she worries about him the least. GOLD also took young people ‘out’ from Griffith and gave them experiences of community beyond the city itself. The mother continued, “ I know he still has a long way to go academically, but now I feel he has caught up in some aspects of his life”.

While being involved with GOLD in a sense could be seen as a diversion, the reality is that it was much more than that. For example, communication was improved for both client groups—multi-generational rural farming families and young people outside mainstream education or ‘at-risk’ of not successfully completing education or training—with understanding and relationships built. As one young person recounted, “I got a whole new different respect for farmers”, and another “it’s all about how to cope with hardship, or not”. Consequently, many stereotypes of men held by young people were challenged breaking moulds or established patterns of behaviour, and social cohesion was improved with flow on benefits in regard to reducing fear of crime and potential criminal behaviour.

The work of GOLD can be understood to be *parajudicial* in the sense that it sits in an intermediate zone outside of the civil justice system altering predispositions or motivations to commit crime enhancing skills or cognitions and providing opportunities to not do so (Ekblom & Wyvekens, 2004); Big *h*ART in this way works to provide ‘upstream’ crime proofing solutions. Measuring this is highly problematic

as it is contingent on crime events **not** happening in a context that is dynamic, complex and changes over time. However, if crime prevention can be seen in terms of community safety and harm reduction, GOLD achieved more than a reduction of numbers through improved social and educational benefits.

### **How was this achieved**

It was possible to observe three main cultural shifts that Big *h*ART was responsive to through its practices each contributing to the creation of context, partnerships, and behavioural change taking crime prevention away from institutions and into communities in which it occurs. First, the *proliferation of technology*: this is observed through the range of devices now available, the availability of content, and immediacy of access. Big *h*ART, for example, used a large range of digital devices throughout the project providing workshops, training and promoting skill development in them. This provision was particularly salient in a context where there are increasing demands for Information Technology and Communication skills and/or vocational education. Second, *diversification*: this shift is observable through an expansion of aesthetic taste, evolution of cultural aesthetic forms, updated and modernisations of traditional forms, settings, the do-it-yourself culture, and blurring boundaries of artistic forms. For example, Big *h*ART used multi-media in a range of non-traditional settings with young people developing and building on their desires to be creators rather than receivers. The flow on effects from this approach has been substantial with young people returning to education or seeking further education and training, a growth in self-esteem and self-respect, and an enhanced understanding between the two targeted populations: young people and rural farming families. Third, *accessibility and flexibility*: this is apparent

in the high-speed exchange and delivery of digital content. Big *h*ART established the purpose built digital platform for GOLD. This enabled rapid dissemination of content and communication unbounded by geography. While uptake of some components of this element was slow, it enabled creative work to be shared nationally and internationally. For example, the website recorded many international 'hits' and subscribers represented diverse geographies of space and place.

The following Results Chart summarises the project's objectives, provides an achievement statement in a summary form, notes the evidence that supports each, and comments on further exceptions or issues.

## OUTCOME EVALUATION—The Results Chart

Objective	2006-2009 achievement statement in summary form	Evidence to support summary statement	Exceptions, issues or comment
<b>To engage young people in creative workshops that develop literacy and other skills, diverting involvement in crime.</b>	Contact was made with young people both through the shopfront established and referrals from other service providers.	43 young people (YP) engaged	One young person was facilitated to attend a national writers workshop in Newcastle
	Relationships were established and developed.	* A core group of 22 YP was established * 62 partnerships—formal and informal—established * 34 community partnership relationships were established with other service providers * 28 individual volunteer supporters	Arts workers reported some difficulties resulting from timing of the announcement exacerbating tensions between federal, state and local government politics.
	Workshops for young people were run both in small groups and on a one-to-one basis.	300 workshops conducted	Some local service providers acted in ways that reflected jealousy of Big hART's successes.
	Young people developed digital literacy skills, documenting rural families stories.	Creative work produced: 60 film works, 1500 curated digital images, 22 recorded songs.  10 young people have found sustainable employment. 7 YP returned to mainstream education, 1 YP to TAFE in Melbourne, 1 YP regularly on community radio, 2 YP writing towards a novel, 7 YP	GOLD-CROP became the main creative outcome of the project. It was successful as an engagement strategy for both young people and rural farming families. GOLD-CROP was 'produced' in Mildura, Griffith, Sydney, Trundle, Talgarno and Boree Creek.

		previously socially isolated participated in media interviews.	
<b>To engage rural families and create presentations to increase help-seeking behaviour and reduce crime</b>	Social capital was built, a consequence of which is directly linked to an increase in social interaction and trust and self-described decrease in crime and self-harming behaviour. For example, there were high levels of self-disclosure by young people and rural farming families involved in the project reflecting increasing levels of trust and positive social exchange	<p>There were 48 visits to rural properties.</p> <p>The project hosted events in 13 rural communities.</p> <p>33 farming families were engaged with the project comprising 77 individuals.</p> <p>Participation in showcase events such as Trundle Bush Tucker/Field Day.</p> <p>31 farmers from 12 rural farming families and 7 YP participated in the GOLD-CROP CarriageWorks event.</p> <p>* Referrals were made to other service providers.  * Some projects participants also self-referred to other service providers as a consequence of links established through the project.  * YP self-disclosed reductions in anti-social behaviour.</p>	<p>Farming families reported felt 'energised' through project participation in contrast to feeling 'worn down' by the drought.</p> <p>Both YP and farmer participants reported 'prejudices dismantled' and confidence increased.</p> <p>The geographical footprint of the project—distance travelled—was both a strength and a limitation.</p> <p>One farmer recounted how he used to talk with other farmers about sheep and wool process, now they talk about how many anti-depressants they were on.</p>
<b>To develop a widespread media and community campaign through participation of both groups taking drought experience to the greater community.</b>	Substantial media opportunities were provided and capitalised on. This included wide spread print media, local newspapers and national magazines, local radio news stories, regional TV news	<p>* 19 Print media articles</p> <p>* 9 radio interviews</p> <p>* 2 local TV news stories</p> <p>* 1 national TV news story (ABC 7.30 Report)</p> <p>* 1 45sec TVC (broadcast on SBS Jan – April 2010)</p>	The most successful outcome was viewing the creative content, the least successful was the degree of interaction amongst rural farming families—this reflects the relative unfamiliarity of social networking



	stories, national free-to-air TV exposure		amongst this demographic.
	Community events were established	Final event GOLD-CROP CarriageWorks, Sydney November 2009. The approximate audience numbers for the total community events was 6200.	One YP seconded as an assistant to the ABCTV "The Chaser" team.
	Purpose built digital platform	The GOLDLAB website counter showed: 19889 page views, 4562 site visits, 2416 unique visits, 243 registered users, 440 forum posts, 63 topics, 46 active users	Media material was refined by young people, rural families and Big hART.
	A reference group was established that met regularly.		"We got over the negative press on young people" – reference group member.

What the Results Chart reveals is that Big hART through GOLD has achieved the following:

1. Strengthened social networks through positive social exchange.
2. Engaged and skilled young people, thereby providing freedom of choice and action.
3. Raised awareness of rural people and their challenges for example, lack of security of water and impacts on income, stable social systems, and access to resources nationally and internationally.
4. Created digital repositories of artefacts and stories that represent rural Australians.
5. Provided rural families with a name, face and voice thereby reducing the high cost of social isolation and commensurately social building social wellbeing and social inclusion.
6. Empowerment of young people, who despite the potential they possess, have often been restricted from participating socially and environmentally by social and cultural structures.

In addition, while a large-scale commercial production has not yet been developed as an outcome of GOLD processes, it is important to acknowledge the impact of one significant media event; that is the 7:30 Report on ABCTV (15/12/09) that focussed on human impact of the drought. This report, built out of Big *hART*'s close relationship with one farmer participant—Ken Mitchell—and his family, revealed Ken's challenging life circumstances and subsequent death. This one report (<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2009/s2772750.htm>), broadcast on national free to air TV, was an outcome of a relationship built by Big *hART* over a significant level of time displaying high levels of social facility and sensitivity, and the commensurate high level of trust placed in Big *hART* by the Mitchell family. It was the families' insistence, for example, that Ken's funeral be filmed, and his story told. This broadcast was watched by 159,000 viewers nation-wide (<http://www.oztam.com.au/>), and provided wide-scale visibility to the challenges of rural life. In a parallel way, young people also reported a "new sense of belonging" where Big *hART* was like a surrogate "family".

This significant event was one of many social-awareness raising activities that has potential not only in terms of raising awareness but also in instigating changes in behaviour—an imperative strengthened by such media reports. For example, suicide is a highly sensitive topic and is widely underreported in Australia. Stories with such a wide exposure as Ken's contribute to the current debate, currently referred to as "The Last Taboo" and "Out of the Shadows" (The Australian February 26-27, March 19-20 respectively) and enrich the debate around the Australian Press Council guidelines for media reporting. This is an important outcome for the project as social isolation, and lack public awareness lead to low levels of help-seeking

behaviour thereby reinforcing the silence and shame surrounding suicide with young men in rural and remote areas; this being a high-risk group for self-harm (Suicide Prevention Australia). In this way, GOLD built interpersonal interactions and social ties through a variety of modalities recognised for building community (Buila, 2009; Maybery, Pope, Hodgins, Hitchenor, & Shepherd, 2009); and contributed to a wider social policy debate.

Through GOLD Big *h*ART contributed productively to the communities in which it worked building the social wellbeing, social capital and fabric of rural Australia where project participants reported feeling isolated, alienated and disconnected from the rest of the nation. This was achieved through focussing on community socialising events bridging separation and isolation felt by rural farming families and young people. Young people, for example, reported feeling accepted into smaller communities, and 'learnt' through communicating with a diverse range of people with wider life experiences. GOLD particularly provided education and training to these young people in a context where there is increased demand for multi-literacies but options and opportunities for accessing these is diminishing. What this meant was that through digital imagery GOLD-CROP was able to tell a story that was not 'intimidating' and was able to 'ease people in' in essentially conservative communities where in the words of one farmer, 'we like what we are used to'.

The link between culture, development, and social stability is clear and has different dimensions. [United Nations. 2006. "The Millennium Development Goals Report: 2006." United Nations Development Programme, [www.undp.org/publications/MDGReport2006.pdf](http://www.undp.org/publications/MDGReport2006.pdf) (accessed January 2, 2008).]

What GOLD reveals, and is consistent with international and national experience is

that culture is a tool for dialogue and social inclusion, and therefore key in **social cohesion** and **stability** each being key to human development and increasing each individual's human capabilities. In particular, GOLD highlights a strategic convergence of economic, social and human elements that lead to the development of a community. What can be seen through GOLD is the development of understanding of young people, rural farming families, and the communities in which they live through a composite of opportunity, skills development, and the provision of a series of platforms where diversity, challenge, and opportunity were presented. It is this development, reflected in multiple lines of evidence, that leads to a reduction of social and cultural isolation thereby increasing peace, tolerance and more productive ways of preventing and managing conflict. In short, GOLD built trust—a key building block in social capital and maintaining contact with others particularly in rural communities (Woodhouse, 2006).

Big *h*ART, then, can be seen to contribute through GOLD to the Millennium Development Goals adopted in September 2010 by all 192 United Nation member states aimed at improving social and economic conditions worldwide. What is unique about this contribution is the use of young people as culture makers both drawing on and contributing to multiple forms of cultural expression. This means that not only are project participants more *creative, innovative* and *open to change* but that the circumstances of their lives, the farming families that they worked with, the challenges embedded in each, are made accessible to the nation.

Finally, to underscore a key Big *h*ART principle, “It is harder to hurt someone when you know their story”. Responsibility for crime reduction and prevention lies in everything from good urban design, parenting skills, to relationships between sub-

cultures. What GOLD reveals is that when populations have access to and can contribute to multiple forms of cultural expression, their capacity to preserve their “distinctive cultural features” (heritage and traditions) as well as their receptiveness to creativity, innovation and change is enhanced. Furthermore, integrating a cultural dimension suitable for the local context can be a source of preventative interventions, preventative contexts, and a source of awareness for individuals, institutions and communities alike. In short, GOLD represented many fine achievements and is emblematic of a development trajectory worth supporting.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Lessons learnt**

During 2009 there was no Big *h*ART presence in Griffith itself; for example, the shop front, a contact point and focus for the project, closed. This was partly because of ‘trips away’ and partly because of resource issues. While being on the road increased the visibility of the project and broke down the isolation felt by many rural farming families, some young people not free to travel felt ‘let down’. In addition, some of the strong local relationships and networks in Griffith itself were not able to be sustained in the same way while there was not a visible presence and opportunities to promote the project were missed. Some Big *h*ART arts workers were also significantly challenged by issues that arose in relation to some of the unfolding mental-health trauma in farming families. In response, a mental-health first-aid course was organised for team members. Some team members also found the transition into rural communities challenging where there was little anonymity, different urban-rural conceptions of space and place, and little separation of personal and professional. Consequently, the exit strategy from Griffith was not as

well implemented as it might have been.

While the digital platform offered many opportunities for communication amongst young people and rural farming families, young people's interest in GOLDLAB diminished over the life of the project. This was in part because for young people it served some parallel purposes to popular social networking sites such as Facebook, and could not compete as they moved to the wider opportunities for social interaction provided through it. In addition, despite the need for increased social learning rural farming families were generally less familiar with social networking technology and consequently there was a slower uptake; this is consistent with other reported experiences (Fabiansson, 2006).

Big *h*ART received funding through this scheme in significant part from the Federal Government. The team itself reported that the timing of the media release itself in relation to successful funding was inopportune, creating substantial challenges as Federal, State, and Local Government politics compounded local tensions around support, inter-agency tensions, and lack of support for communities such as Griffith and surrounding areas. Taking into account the profound effects of the Big Dry in individuals and communities' lives, and the substantial geographical footprint of the project, there were not enough financial resources to sustain and promote the project.

Griffith itself was also a 'hard town to crack'. The town has a long history of challenges and has appeared in national and international media purportedly as a 'centre' of the drug trade, family competition for control of this lucrative trade, and associated systemic violence. Consequently, the town was commented on by many as being 'closed' and 'suspicious' of outsiders—the regional theatre, for example,

while initially open to the project did not make access easy for young project participants who were seen as “youth off the streets”—this led to the shopfront being set up as a project base. While all country towns may have elements of these characteristics, there were significant differences in other rural communities where Big *h*ART was made immediately welcome and accepted. It could well be the case that the project would have been enhanced by a longer lead time in building towards public performance, and further resources to remain in the community longer.

GOLD exhibited many markers of quality for participatory arts practices. It was responsive to issues as they unfolded managing to ‘look *beyond*’ what first presented and instead look *into* people’s lives as they encountered them. It is this ability that makes the work authentic, contributes to better understanding, and develops cultural literacy connecting to Australian’s lives. What GOLD revealed, and is deeply embedded within both its processes and products is that we are all enhanced, and our capacities developed by this ability. In this way, Big *h*ART builds following Raymond Williams, “resources of hope” (1989) and resilience to change.

Finally, and in the words of one farmer, “Big *h*ART [coming] is like someone saving a life”.

## References

- Bass, L. J. (2008) A Pooled Time Series Analysis of Hurricane Katrina Evacuees and their Effect on Crime Rates *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the MPSA Annual National Conference*, Palmer House Hotel, Hilton, Chicago, IL  
[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p266793\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p266793_index.html)
- Buila, S. (2009). Using the Media to Enhance Well-being and Mental Health. *Rural Society*, 19(4), 363-367.
- Eckblom, P., & Wyvekens, A. (2004). *A Partnership Approach to Crime Prevention*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Fabiansson, C. (2006). Being Young in Rural Settings: Young People's Everyday Community Affiliations and Trepidations. *Rural Society*, 16(1), 47-61.
- Maybery, D., Pope, R., Hodgins, G., Hitchenor, Y., & Shepherd, A. (2009). Resilience and Well-being of Small Inland Communities: Community Assets as Key Determinants *Rural Society*, 19(4), 326-339.
- Sampson, R. J., Raudenbush, S. W., & Earls, F. (1997). Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy. *Science*, 277(5328), 918-924.  
doi: 10.1126/science.277.5328.918
- Williams, R. (1989). *Resources of Hope*. London: Verso.
- Woodhouse, A. (2006). People are Accepted as Long as They Don't Misbehave. *Rural Society*, 16(1), 5-24.
- Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. (2008). Talking About the Big Dry: Young People and the Impact of Drought. Melbourne: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.



